



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

HANDEL, ROLLI, AND ITALIAN OPERA IN LONDON IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By R. A. STREATFEILD

In the Biblioteca Estense at Modena there is a small collection of the letters of Paolo Rolli, protected from indiscriminate perusal, as the late Dr. Garnett once observed of a somewhat similar piece of calligraphy, by the triple ægis of execrable ink, execrable paper and execrable penmanship. I visited Modena in the Autumn of 1912, and did my best to transcribe and translate all that is decipherable of Rolli's correspondence. The results of my labours are embodied in the following article. I venture to make this personal statement, lest it should be supposed that I have merely borrowed the fruits of Signor Sesto Fassini's researches in the same library, and I may also point out that considerably more of Rolli's correspondence appears in my article than Signor Fassini has yet cared to publish. Nevertheless, I gladly admit my indebtedness to that gentleman's researches on the life and work of Rolli, and I have no desire to minimize my obligations. His able and accurate work, "*Il Melodramma Italiano a Londra nella prima metà del settecento*," has been of the greatest assistance to me in writing the following article, as have also been in a less degree his two pamphlets: "*Il Ritiro del Rolli dall' Inghilterra*," (Perugia, 1908); and "*Dodici lettere inedite di Paolo Rolli*," (Torino, 1911). I should like also to acknowledge my debts to Signor Ercole Sola's "*Curiosità storico-artistico-letterarie trasse dal carteggio dell' inviato estense Giuseppe Riva*," published in the "*Atti e Memorie della R. Deputazione di Storia Patria per le provincie modenese e parmense*," Serie 3, Vol. 4, (Modena, 1886); to Signora Ida Luisi's authoritative essay: "*Un poeta-editore del Settecento*," published in "*Miscellanea di studi critici pubblicati in onore di Guido Mazzoni*," Vol. 2, (Firenze, 1907); and to Signor A. Salza's: "*Note biografiche e bibliografiche intorno a Paolo Rolli*," (Perugia, 1915).

AMONG the lesser luminaries who revolved around the sun of Handel during his dictatorship of English music in the first half of the eighteenth century, not the least brilliant was Paolo Rolli, who wrote many operatic librettos for Handel and other composers, and played a by no means unimportant part in the literary and musical life of England. Rolli was far above the level of the ordinary hack librettist of the day. He was a man of culture and education, and, though the force of necessity compelled him to prostitute his talent to operatic exigencies, in other spheres he won a considerable reputation. The poetical value of his librettos may not be very exalted, but his original



Paolo Antonio Rolli, 1687-1767

verse shows talent, and his Italian translation of Milton's "Paradise Lost" is a valuable contribution to international literature.

Rolli was born in Rome in 1687, two years after Handel saw the light in Halle. In his early years he sat at the feet of the learned Gravina, who is famous as the master of a still more celebrated pupil, Metastasio. Gravina soon discovered his pupil's brilliant talent for improvisation, and introduced him to the literary circles of Rome, where accomplishments of that kind were just then eagerly appreciated. Gravina opened to Rolli the doors of the Arcadian Academy, which he entered under the pastoral name of *Eulibio Berentiatico*, and in great houses such as that of Cardinal Ottoboni he encountered some of the most famous figures in contemporary art and literature. Music reigned supreme in the Ottoboni palace. Corelli, Caldara and Alessandro Scarlatti were among the stars who irradiated the Cardinal's court.

"His Eminence," wrote Blainville, an experienced traveller and insatiable collector of gossip, "keeps in his pay the best musicians and performers in Rome, and amongst others the famous Arcangelo Corelli and young Paolucci, who is reckoned the finest voice in Europe, so that every Wednesday he has an excellent concert in his palace, and we assisted there this very day (May 14, 1707). We were there served with iced and other delicate liquors, and this is likewise the custom when the Cardinals or Roman princes visit each other. But the greatest inconveniency in all these concerts and visits is that one is pestered with swarms of trifling little *abbés*, who come thither on purpose to fill their bellies with these liquors, and to carry off the crystal bottles with the napkins into the bargain."

In such scenes as this, Rolli acquired a knowledge of life and manners that afterwards served him in good stead.

It was doubtless under Ottoboni's roof that he first met the man, who was afterwards to play so important a part in the drama of his life. Handel arrived in Rome in the spring of 1707, intent upon hearing the world-famous music associated with the Holy-Week services in the Sistine Chapel. His fame had preceded him, and the greatest houses in Rome opened their doors to the "famous Saxon," as the Italians always called him. In the Casa Ottoboni he was a welcome guest, and we hear of him playing duets there with a youthful *virtuoso*, whose performance on the *arciliuto* was rousing musical Rome to enthusiasm. Annibale Merlini, a correspondent of Prince Ferdinand dei Medici, mentions him in a letter to his patron:

He is a lad of twelve years, a Roman by birth, who, though of so tender an age, plays the *arciliuto* with such science and freedom that, if compositions he has never even seen are put before him, he rivals the most

experienced and celebrated professors, and wins great admiration and well-deserved applause. He appears at the concerts and leading academies of Rome, as, for instance, that of His Eminence Cardinal Ottoboni . . . and all this can be testified by the famous Saxon, who has heard him in the Casa Ottoboni, and in the Casa Colonna has played with him and plays there continually.

Another house where Rolli must almost certainly have encountered Handel was that of the Marquis Ruspoli. Handel was staying there in 1708, and his Italian oratorio, "La Resurrezione," is signed and dated, "11 Aprile, 1708, dal Marchese Ruspoli." That Rolli was well known to the family of Ruspoli we may assume from the fact that he edited a collection of verse by various Arcadian poets compiled in honor of a prince of that house in 1711. But the harmony of the happy Arcadians was rudely broken shortly after this, and, under the ægis of his master Gravina, Rolli seceded from the Academy in high dudgeon. In 1714 we find him at Naples writing a pastoral entertainment entitled, "Sacrificio a Venere," and describing himself not as an Arcadian, but as *Accademico Quirino*.

It was possibly the troubles with the Arcadian Academy that first turned Rolli's thoughts in the direction of emigration. He had doubtless met travelling Englishmen in Rome, and he may have heard rumours of golden harvests to be reaped on the banks of the Thames. Bolingbroke had been in Rome, intriguing for the return of the Stuarts, and distinguished *connoisseurs*, like Coke, of Norfolk, and Lord Burlington loved to linger over the art treasures of the Vatican. From them Rolli may well have received suggestions for a visit to England, which were pointed by the fact that he was, as he said many years later, in a letter to a friend, "tired of serving Cardinals." Italian literature was popular in England in the early days of the eighteenth century, and London's sudden craze for Italian opera seemed to open vistas of fame and fortune to ambitious sons of the South.

We do not know precisely when Rolli left Rome for England, nor with whom he travelled. The names of various patrons have been suggested, and most of his biographers seem to have made up their minds that Lord Pembroke was his travelling companion. On the other hand we have a definite statement on the subject from the Abate Giuseppe Riva, Ambassador of the Grand Duke of Modena at the English Court, who, in a letter to the famous Muratori, dated January 31, 1716, says:

The Abate Rolli has arrived here from Rome with the brother of Lord Stair, a fine poet and a wonderful improviser, whom I knew

well in Rome. We are delighted to meet each other once more over here.

Rolli had influential friends, and soon made his way to Court. He found a gracious patroness in Caroline, Princess of Wales, who appointed him professor of Italian to her young daughters at a salary of £100 a year, to which not very princely income he added materially by giving Italian lessons to various scions of the English aristocracy, and by literary work of different kinds. Rolli always enjoyed court favour. When Frederick (afterwards Prince of Wales) arrived in England in 1728, Rolli soon contrived to win his good graces, and in a letter to a friend written some years afterwards, he counts openly upon a golden future, when Prince Frederick should have succeeded to the crown. These bright hopes, it need hardly be said, were not destined to fulfilment, but Rolli never lost his hold upon the court, and the comfortable competence which he took home to Italy after thirty years' residence in England, was a tangible proof that he knew which side his bread was buttered.

In London Rolli found a pleasant little circle of compatriots. Riva, who has already been mentioned, was an accomplished courtier, and another who basked in royal favour was the Abate Conti, a friend of Newton and a member of the Royal Society. A few years after Rolli's arrival, the London circle of Italians was enriched by the accession of Antonio Cocchi, mathematician, physician, linguist and philosopher, whose diary, throwing very interesting light upon the London life of the period, is still preserved in the Medical Library of the Istituto di Studi Superiori at Florence. Besides these learned men there was a tribe of musicians, headed by Bononcini and Ariosti, who, with many lesser lights, assembled principally in the house of the Duchess of Shrewsbury, herself an Italian of romantic origin and history, who had been seen, loved and wedded by the Duke during a tour in Italy.

Cocchi's diary often throws an amusing light upon the habits of the little coterie. Money seems usually to have been scarce, and a great deal of borrowing and lending of small sums went on in that impecunious confraternity. However, even when funds were low, the light-hearted Italians seem to have enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and Cocchi's diary recounts their adventures—some of them none too respectable—with infinite gusto. Rolli was the poet of the circle, and many of his poems reflect the convivial life of London in the gayest fashion. His "Meriboniane" are joyous odes on the delights of Marylebone Gardens, where he seems to have spent some of his happiest hours.

During the first few years that he spent in England, Rolli devoted his leisure to literary tasks. He published a book of poems in 1717, edited various Italian classics and translated Lucretius. He appears also to have constituted himself the London agent of an Italian publisher, who made a good thing out of catering for the taste for Italian literature, which at that time, as I have already said, prevailed in England.

We get glimpses of court and musical life in a letter of Rolli's, dated from Thistleworth, 13th July, 1719:

La Denys, *alias* Sciarpina, has already sung twice before the Princess [Caroline, Princess of Wales]. La Parca assists her. The Man ["l'Uomo"] loves and dissimulates, but how long is this to last? La Zanzara Castratina has agreed with Castrucci and Pippo to appear before this excellent Princess twice a week. Sandoni plays the harpsichord, and is much approved. He also will be rewarded, and I am very glad that he had been introduced to Court. Attilio has returned to Town. A lawsuit has driven him from home.

I can throw no light upon the personalities of La Sciarpina, La Parca and La Zanzara Castratina. "L'Uomo" is a phrase that Rolli used later as a nickname for Handel, and it probably denotes him here, as Handel was always a favourite of Caroline's, and at this time was actually engaged as music teacher to her daughters. Sandoni was a popular teacher of singing, and later became *maestro al cembalo* at the opera under Handel. He subsequently married Cuzzoni, who is said to have poisoned him. Attilio was the celebrated composer Ariosti. We hear of him in London playing a solo on the *viola d'amore* between the acts of Handel's "Amadigi," on the 12th of July, 1716. "Pippo" was another composer, Filippo Mattei. Castrucci was a famous violinist, and the leader of Handel's opera orchestra. He is said to have been the "Enraged Musician" of Hogarth's well-known print.

Rolli's introduction to the English Theatre was effected under the most auspicious conditions. In the winter of 1718-19 a scheme had been set on foot for establishing a permanent Italian opera in London under the name of "The Royal Academy of Music." A President and a Committee of twenty Directors were appointed. Handel, Bononcini and Ariosti were to be the Composers in ordinary to the Academy, and Rolli was appointed poet at a salary of £200 a year. Early in 1719, Handel went abroad to collect his singers, and Rolli sat down and invoked the Muse. During the next twenty years he produced some dozen operatic dramas, and adapted many others for the English stage. These works have little poetical value—Rolli himself spoke of them as

“dramatic skeletons”—but they are no worse, if no better, than hundreds of others produced at the time by rival poets in similar circumstances. When we consider what were the conditions of operatic production in England in Rolli’s days, the hard and fast rules that governed its design, and the difficulties of suiting a restricted company, it cannot be wondered at that Rolli did not succeed in infusing much poetical distinction into his librettos. There is extant an interesting letter of Riva’s to Muratori, in which he gives us some idea of the operatic conditions in England in the year 1725. Muratori had recommended to Riva a young poet who was anxious to gain a footing in the operatic world. Riva’s rejoinder is as follows:

The operas which are given in England, however fine as music, and however well sung, are nevertheless ruined by their poetry. Our friend Rolli who, when the present Academy was formed, was commissioned to write the librettos, began by producing two very good ones, but he then quarrelled with the directors, and they then took into their employment a certain Haym, a Roman violoncellist, a man who was little short of an idiot as far as literature was concerned. Deserting the orchestra for the slopes of Parnassus, he has for the last three years employed himself in adapting a number of old librettos for the use of the composers who write operas for the English stage, making still worse what was bad before. Our friend, Bononcini, however, has been an exception. He has got his librettos from Rome, where they were written by certain pupils of Gravina. If your friend thinks of sending a specimen of his work here, I must warn him that in England people like very few recitatives, thirty airs and one duet at least distributed over the three acts. The subject must be simple, tender, heroic—Roman, Greek or possibly Persian, but never Gothic or Lombard. For this year, and for the next two, there must be two equal parts in the operas for Cuzzoni and Faustina. Senesino takes the principal male character and his part must be heroic. The other three male parts should be arranged proportionally song for song in all three acts. The duet should be at the end of the second act, and entrusted to the two women. If the subject demands three women, a third woman may be employed, as there is a third singer here to take the part. If the Duchess of Marlborough, who gives £500 a year to Bononcini, will allow him to give the Academy an opera, it will be “*Andromaca*,” which is almost a translation of Racine’s drama, omitting the death of Pyrrhus, cleverly turned into an opera libretto. From it your friend can get an idea of the sort of opera which is popular in England. Meanwhile, if he likes to send a libretto, I will see that it reaches the proper hands, and if it should happen to suit one of our composers, which I do not doubt, I will see that the payment is guaranteed. The packet should be sent to our Jew correspondents in Amsterdam, so that they can pack it in some bale of silk, and hand it over to me as I pass through, in case I should again have cause to revisit the *ultimi divisi* (i. e., the English).

On the receipt of this letter Muratori's Modenese friend not only despatched a libretto to Riva, but proposed to follow it in person. His plans, however, were frustrated by the following discouraging missive:

In spite of my desire to carry out your wishes, I fear I can be of no use in the matter of the opera which you propose to send me by the post, since our composers have chosen their librettos for the coming season and are already at work upon them. It will be difficult, too, to get anything accepted for another year, as the Academy has its own poet, and the operas that come from Italy cannot serve for this theatre. They have to be reformed, or I should rather say deformed, in order to bring them into the shape which the English public favours. Few verses of recitative and many airs are the fashion here, and this is the reason why none of the best operas of Sig. Apostolo has been performed here, and that the two finest of Metastasio, that is to say "Didone" and "Siroe," have suffered the same fate. Besides, as it is, we have more poets here than are wanted. Exclusive of the Academy's poet, there are Rolli and a certain Brillanti, of Pistoja, who is doing so well, that all the others are idle, so it would be throwing good money away for your friend to undertake a journey hither.

The Royal Academy of Music, now established at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, opened its doors on the 2nd April, 1720, with an opera entitled "Numitore," written by Rolli and composed by Giovanni Porta, which kept the house warm until the great novelty of the season, Handel's "Radamisto," was produced on the 27th of April. On the 30th of May, "Narciso" by Domenico Scarlatti, was produced, the original libretto having been adapted to suit English taste by Rolli, who dedicated his work to the Princess of Wales. These three operas seem to have held the boards, until the season closed on July 6th, with a performance of "Numitore." So far all had been peace. Bononcini had not arrived to threaten Handel's supremacy, and the great man ruled alone. But troubles were in store, not the least of which was the bursting of the South-Sea Bubble, which brought the King in a hurry back from Hanover, and threw all London into disorder and confusion. Everyone, from the highest to the lowest was affected by the "slump." Rolli wrote to Riva: "But, my dear Riva, what a ruin is this of the South-Sea! All the nobility is in the depths of anguish. One sees none but gloomy faces." And in a later letter he adds: "They ought to gibbet these South-Sea directors, who have ruined all my friends, and in consequence will, it seems, come near to ruining the Academy."

In spite of Rolli's sinister predictions, the Academy re-opened the doors of the Haymarket Theatre on the 19th of November,

1720, with Bononcini's "Astarto," adapted by Rolli, who, in dedicating the work to Lord Burlington, reminded him of the fact that he first heard the work at the Teatro Capranica, Rome, under the direction of Rolli himself. "Astarto" saw the first appearance in England of the famous male contralto, Senesino, whose marvellous voice and singing had a good deal to do with bringing about the craze for Italian opera which devastated London society for the next twenty years. Senesino was the favourite butt of the anti-Italian journalists and caricaturists. Many were the lampoons in which his effeminacy was pilloried; many the cartoons in which his spindle-shanked figure was held up to ridicule. Of his musicianship there could not be two opinions. His character was venomously attacked by his enemies, but Rolli, at any rate, had a good word to say for him. He wrote on the 23rd September, 1720:

Last Monday Senesino arrived, in company with Berselli and Salvai. I heard the news while dining at Richmond on Tuesday, and at once came up to Town with our dear Casimir.¹ I am delighted to find that the celebrated artist is a man of polished manners, well-read, extremely agreeable and imbued with the highest sentiments.

Rolli was now in the thick of the operatic conflict. There is a long letter at Modena sent by him to Riva in October, 1720, abominably written, grievously blotted, torn, defaced, and almost illegible, referring to the proposed production of an opera entitled "Amore e Maestà," which was supported by Durastanti and Senesino and opposed by Handel, of whom Rolli speaks in no measured terms, calling him "the Man" ["l'Uomo"], "the Savage" ["il Selvaggio"], and everything else in the way of insult he could lay his pen to. Heidegger, who was another of his *bêtes noires*, appears as "l'Eideggherone." Much of the letter defies transcription. Here is an extract from it:

Learn that la Margherita [Durastanti] in concert with our friend Senesino has proposed the opera, "Amore e Maestà," which cannot be given in the version used at Florence, because it contains such an immense amount of recitative, and so few ariettas that Senesino would only have four solos in the whole work. So I had orders to shorten it, and with the assistance of I added to it and changed it where necessary. The Alpine Faun ["l'Alpestre Fauno," *i. e.*, Handel, possibly in allusion to his German origin], is all for the old system, which he is always advocating, because he says that the more one works at a

¹Casimiro Avelloni, the husband of the famous soprano, Durastanti.

thing, the more it remains the same as before. He proposes Polani¹ to adapt and direct the opera. Senesino is furious. . . .

"Amore e Maestà" was produced on the 1st of February, 1721, under the name of "Arsace." The music was by Orlandini. It won little success, and the town still talked of nothing but the rival charms of "Radamisto" and "Astarto." A new way of settling the point of precedence between Handel and Bononcini was exploited by the Academy in the production of "Muzio Scevola," an opera in three acts, of which the first was composed by Filippo Mattei; the second by Bononcini, and the third by Handel. Rolli, who supplied the libretto, must have had a difficult task to satisfy the requirements of the three composers. No one profited much by "Muzio Scevola," which fell very flat; indeed, at the first performance (15th April, 1721), the great excitement of the evening was not the decision of the respective merits of the three composers, but the news of the birth of the Duke of Cumberland, which was announced during the entr'acte. If "Muzio Scevola" left the supremacy of Handel still intact, and "Ciro, o l'Odio e l'Amore" (20th May, 1720) failed to establish Attilio Ariosti as a serious rival to his two greater brethren, "Crispo" (10th January, 1722), and "Griselda" (22nd February, 1722), both written by Rolli, made Bononcini the hero of the hour. Bononcini's graceful little melodies enchanted ears which were deaf to the nobler strains of Handel, and the celebrated Anastasia Robinson, who was not musician enough to do justice to Handel, won the hearts of all the amateurs by her delicious warbling of the still famous "Per la gloria." Handel was for the moment outmanœuvred, and his attempt to take a leaf out of his rival's book by imitating the almost ballad-like simplicity of Bononcini's songs won little success for "Floridante" (9th December, 1721). Bononcini was at the top of the tree, and the favourite topic of discussion at London tea-tables was no longer whether he or Handel were the greater, but, if we may judge from the chatter of two opera-goers in Steele's "Conscious Lovers," whether "Crispo" was to be preferred to "Griselda." But Bononcini's triumph was short-lived. He had trouble with the directors of the Academy, his haughty, obstinate temper serving him, as usual, but ill, and in October, 1722, Lady Bristol wrote to her husband: "Bononcini is dismissed the theatre for operas, which I believe you and some

¹ Girolamo Polani was a Venetian singer and composer, whose acquaintance Handel may have made, as he must almost certainly have heard his music, in Venice ten years before. Polani's arrival in England is mentioned by Rolli earlier in the same letter.

of your family will regret. The reason they give for it is his extravagant demands." He did not, however, leave London. The Duchess of Marlborough took pity on him, gave him a roof over his head and £500 a year, and allowed no music but his to be heard at her parties. Bononcini's quarrel with the Academy seems to have been patched up, as he certainly continued to write for them, his "Erminia," to a libretto by Rolli, being produced on 30th March, 1723, his "Farnace" 27th November, 1723, his "Calphurnia" on 18th April, 1724, and his "Astianatte" 6th May, 1727. Long before this, however, Bononcini's vogue had deserted him. The fickle public tired of his pretty tunes, and the advent of the great Cuzzoni gave Handel an interpreter worthy of his genius, so that in the blaze of his triumph Bononcini's taper paled its ineffectual fires. In the success of these brilliant years Rolli had little share. For three years his name did not appear on the opera bills, and we do not meet it again until 1726, when he figures once more in his accustomed place as the author of Handel's "Scipione" (12th March, 1726).

Why Rolli was deposed from his place as poet to the Academy is not known, but a shrewd guess may be hazarded when the character of Handel is taken into consideration and the sentiments of Rolli with regard to his autocratic chief. The way in which Rolli speaks of Handel in his private correspondence shows pretty clearly the mingled fear, awe and detestation with which he regarded him, and if we remember the description of Handel and his methods of working supplied us by another of his librettists, Thomas Morell, we may gather that Rolli's occupation was very far from being a bed of roses, and may take for granted that a particularly stormy interview with the irate composer ended in Rolli's precipitate retreat from the opera-house and retirement to the idyllic seclusion of Richmond. In 1726, as we have said, the quarrel was patched up, and Rolli returned to his allegiance.

From this point to the collapse of the Academy in 1728, Rolli played a more active part, furnishing Handel with the librettos of "Alessandro" (30th April, 1726) and "Riccardo" (11th November, 1727). In "Alessandro" he and Handel had the difficult task of providing parts of equal importance for the rival prima-donnas, Faustina and Cuzzoni. The balance was cleverly held between the two jealous women. They sang song for song throughout the opera. Each of them sang a duet with Senesino, and they had one duet together which was so skilfully composed that neither of them could say which was singing the principal part. If Rolli's

verses were pedestrian, his "Alessandro" was at least a triumph of *savoir-faire*.

During the years of Rolli's enforced absence from the opera-house, his time was mainly devoted to literary work. We may pass lightly over his minor tasks, such as his editions of the Decameron and Berni's "Opere burlesche," to linger over a work which will perhaps immortalize his name, when the fame of his operas is sunk in the dust—his translation of Milton's "Paradise Lost." Rolli had been at work upon Milton for many years. In 1717 Riva announced to Muratori that Rolli was beginning upon his gigantic task, and by 1722 he could report material progress. By 1726 six cantos were completed, and Cocchi, of whose critical acumen Riva evidently thought highly, was loud in Rolli's praise. In the following year we hear that

Rolli with his intrepid Muse is hard at work at the translation of Milton. He is thinking of leaving a *lacuna* where the English poet speaks of indulgences and of the Trinity, lest the book should be prohibited in Italy. But he has not made up his mind on this point, and I really do not know how to advise him, since it seems impossible to be at the same time a good Catholic and a faithful translator.

In 1729 Rolli published in London the first six books of his translation of "Paradise Lost," and six years later the whole work appeared in a sumptuous folio edition with engraved portraits of Milton and his translator. Rolli won warm eulogies for his version of Milton, which was the first ever made into Italian verse. It is said by Italian critics to be singularly faithful, though lacking in elegance of style and poetical quality.

The Academy collapsed in June, 1728, and Rolli was once more out of employment. A new Academy was speedily formed under the auspices of Handel and Heidegger, but in this Rolli had neither part nor lot. He took refuge from poetry in criticism and some months before the new Academy had begun operations we find him sending a budget of operatic gossip to Senesino, whom Handel had refused to include in his company, and who was then in Italy. Writing in January, 1729, he says:

Heidegger came back and said he could find no singers in Italy. He declared he would not undertake anything without the two ladies (Faustina and Cuzzoni). He would not even consider any but these two, and he also proposed Farinelli. At last, hearing that your friends wished to get you back, he gave way and you came on to the *tapis* once more. He was thinking, of course, a good deal more of a big subscription than of anything else and rightly so, for the two parties (*i. e.*, Faustinians and Cuzzonites) and your friends in both would have filled up the

annual subscription at twenty pounds a head. This was the supposition on which my first letter to you, as you will remember, was founded. But Handel was not to be lulled to sleep by this sort of piping. He speedily exposed the malice of his rival (Heidegger), the useless folly of his ridiculous journey abroad, and his hopes of private profit. He said that what was wanted was variety. He was in favour of reviving the old system of constantly changing the singers, so as to have an opportunity of composing new songs for new artists. He found supporters for his new scheme in the Court, and soon won everyone to his view. He would not have Faustina. He saw through all your schemes. He wanted Farinelli and Cuzzoni, if she could be got away from Vienna, and in fact anyone who could be got. My Lord Bingley is at the head of the scheme; but then comes the question of the theatre, so Heidegger is called in, and they agree to give him £2,200 for providing theatre, scenery and dresses. Handel is to have £1,000 for composing music himself, or providing that of others. The subscription is to be fifteen guineas, and so far that seems to be enough. It is proposed to spend £4,000 on the singers in all, two at £100 a head, with a benefit and all the rest of it, and Handel is to start shortly for Italy, to choose the company.

On 2nd February, 1729, he writes again:

The new Handel-Heidegger scheme is finding its feet. There was a general meeting, with a lot of talking. Only a few people came, and of those only six or seven actually subscribed. Some others did not absolutely refuse, and others again insisted on knowing who the singers were to be, before they committed themselves. The royal wishes were explained, and it was decided that Handel should shortly start for Italy to look out for singers. The use of the dresses and scenery of the Academy for five years was unanimously granted to the two managers. Handel is now on the point of starting, and ten days ago Haym sent circular letters to Italy announcing the new undertaking and Handel's speedy arrival to all the artists concerned. Everybody is talking about Farinelli, all the more so because a short time ago letters came from Venice, in particular to the Ambassador Vignola saying that the theatre where Farinelli was singing was crowded, while that where you and Faustina were was almost empty. The Ambassador also made this statement with regard to the two *virtuose*, that if both Cuzzoni and Faustina returned he would contribute what he had promised; if Cuzzoni alone returned he would contribute the same, but if Faustina alone returned, he would contribute nothing. It is quite uncertain whether Cuzzoni returns or not. We get no letters from Vienna owing to delay in the post, but the last news spoke of presents and not of engagements, all the same as her great aim always is an engagement, they may succeed in getting her, as she has already made a success here, and is perhaps disposed to content herself with a moderate and permanent certainty rather than wait for a more profitable uncertainty.

The aim of the new scheme is to have everything new. Our dear little Handel ["il caro Handelino"] is determined to try experiments and to pay court to the right people. . . . I am still on bad terms with him, and shall remain so, and I refused to wish him a successful journey.

But a few days ago Goupy came to pay a visit to my brother, questioning him about Handel's jaunt abroad and the new scheme, so as to hear what we had to say, and our replies were all approving. He said further that Faustina had been the reason of the disagreement between me and my friend—to which the reply was indifference and resentment. He hated the lady, and said that everything was going to be new, saying also that our friend still hated Cuzzoni. Riva is furious because he sees that Bononcini had been turned out owing to his own arrogance as well as through the arrogance of the Chief Composer, on whom everything depends. . . .

The gossip in this letter is difficult to make out, and some parts of it, which I have omitted, are absolutely incomprehensible. Still, the sentiments of the Italian small fry in London are unmistakable. One and all groaned beneath Handel's yoke. He ruled his myrmidons with a rod of iron, and though they murmured they had to obey. On September 3rd Rolli was still grumbling:

You knew before that Attilio and Haym have joined forces. Now learn that the famous Rossi, Italian author and poet, is Handel's accredited bard. Nothing is yet known of Cuzzoni.

By the beginning of November the opening of the new Academy was imminent. The singers were already in London, rehearsals were in progress, and everyone was talking about the new season.

Do you really want me, writes Rolli (6th November, 1729), to give you musical news? If everyone were as well satisfied with the company as is the Royal Family, we should have to admit that there never had been such an opera since Adam and Eve sang Milton's hymn in the Garden of Eden. They say that little Strada has all the rapid execution of Faustina and all the sweetness of Cuzzoni, and so on about all the others! We shall see how it turns out. The proof of the pudding is in the eating, as the English proverb says. The truth is that Strada is simply a copy of Faustina with a better voice and better intonation, but without her charm and *brio*.

The new Academy began operations on the 2nd of December, 1729, with Handel's "Lotario." A few days later Rolli writes to Riva:

Ten days ago the opera began with "Lotario." I only went last Tuesday, to the third performance. Everyone thinks it a very bad opera. Bernacchi failed the first night, but at the second performance he changed his method and had a success. In person and voice he does not please like Senesino, but he has his great reputation to fall back upon. The libretto was sung last year by Faustina and Senesino at Venice under the name "Adelaide." Strada pleases mightily, and the Great Man says that she sings better than the two who have left us,

because one of them never really pleased him, and he would like to forget the other.

The truth is that she has a penetrating thread of a soprano voice which tickles the ears—but, oh! how far removed from Cuzzoni! Bononcini, who was with me at the opera, agrees entirely with me as to this. Fabri is a great success. He really sings very well. Would you have believed that here in England, a tenor could have such a triumph? Merighi is really a perfect actress, and this is the general opinion. There is a certain Bertolli, a Roman girl who plays men's parts. O! my dear Riva, if you could only see her perspiring under her helmet—I am sure you would fall in love with her in your most . . . Modenese fashion. ["Son certo che la desidererete Modenesissamente!" An untranslatable pun.] O! she is a pretty girl! There is also a bass from Hamburg [Riemschneider], whose voice is more of a natural contralto than a bass. He sings sweetly in his throat and nose, pronounces Italian *alla Cimbbrica*, acts like a sucking-pig, and looks like a *valet de chambre*. O! it is fine, you may trust me. They are preparing "Giulio Cesare," perhaps because the audiences are diminishing. I think the storm is about to break on the head of our proud Bear. Beans are not for all markets, especially beans so badly cooked as this first basketful. Heidegger has got great credit for his dresses and scenery, though the latter does not rise much above mediocrity. We shall see what we shall see!

The season wore to its close with only moderate success. On the 12th of June Rolli resumed his impressions of it with his usual acrimony:

I have nothing much to say about the Heidegger-Handel couple ["la coppia Eidegrendeliana"], and their miserable opera. They have just succeeded in dragging through the season, and deserved no better. The musicians will be paid, and that is all. No one can say whether we shall have any opera next season or not, or whether the company will be the same, but it is certain that things are going from bad to worse. Strada finds favour with the very few who want to forget Cuzzoni . . . A few days before he died M. Rizzi (?) sent to Goupy a caricature of Cuzzoni and Farinelli singing a duet. Goupy had added the figure of Heidegger seated in a chair with his face turned up, and this has been engraved to the honour and glory of the great army of tuneful *canaille*."

Goupy was an artist, who painted scenery for Handel, and evidently quarrelled with him. He painted the famous pastel caricature of Handel, now in my possession, entitled "The Charming Brute." His engraving of Cuzzoni, Farinelli and Heidegger, here referred to, has often been reproduced.

At the close of the season Handel, if he had not precisely to face defeat and disaster, could not conceal from himself that Bernacchi, his *primo uomo*, was a failure. There was no help for it, he must swallow his pride and have recourse to Senesino. Consequently, when the second season opened on the 3rd of November, 1730, the great *castrato* was once more singing under

Handel's banner. The next three years must be rapidly passed over. The story of Handel's struggles and defeats has often been told, his indomitable efforts to win success with his operas, and his gradual realisation of the fact that the road to fame and fortune led through oratorio.

In the spring of 1733 came the troubles occasioned by Handel's having raised his prices for a performance of "Deborah," which led to the secession of many of his most influential subscribers, and to the foundation of the rival institution, the "Opera of the Nobility." In April, 1733, there appeared in *The Craftsman* a letter signed P--LO R--LI, which purports to be an attack upon Handel, but is in reality a skilfully veiled assault upon Walpole. In all probability Rolli had nothing whatever to do with it. The squib is now generally attributed to Bolingbroke, who seems to have borrowed Rolli's name for the occasion. Apart from its political value, it has an interest for musical historians, since, though it is not what it professes to be, it must necessarily represent pretty accurately the state of feeling that prevailed against Handel at that time in the fashionable world; otherwise its point as a satire would be lost. It also shows us that Rolli was considered sufficiently notorious as an enemy of Handel for Bolingbroke (if he actually was the author) to use him as a stalking-horse in furthering his political campaign.

With the opening of the "Opera of the Nobility" on 29th December, 1733, Rolli reappears in the world of London music. Porpora's "Arianna in Nasso," with which the season began, was written by Rolli, and until the collapse of the venture in 1737, when the rival opera schemes, like the Kilkenny cats, abolished each other simultaneously, Rolli did a large amount of hack-work for his aristocratic patrons. It would be wearisome to the reader to detail the long list of now forgotten works in which Rolli had a share. Among his operas were "Fernando"; "Enea nel Lazio"; "Polifemo," a setting of the tale of Acis and Galatea, which had the advantage of being sung by Cuzzoni, Senesino and Farinelli; "Ifigenia in Aulide" and "Orfeo." He also wrote the oratorio "David e Bersabea," and the serenata "Festa d'Imeneo" for the wedding of the Prince of Wales. Most of these works were set to music by Porpora, the director of the "Opera of the Nobility," a composer of great ability, whose talents have never been properly appreciated by historians of the period. The great attraction of the "Opera of the Nobility" lay in the singing of Farinelli, which seems to have completely turned the heads of London opera-goers. "On aimait les autres," wrote the Abbé Prévost,

“pour celui-ci, on en est idolâtre; c’est une fureur.” His singing entranced even a jealous rival like Senesino, who, when they first appeared together, burst into tears at the conclusion of Farinelli’s first song, ran across the stage and threw himself into the singer’s arms. What his audience thought of him may be summed up in the famous exclamation wrung from a too impressionable dame, and afterwards immortalized by Hogarth: “One God, one Farinelli.” Rolli, in a letter of 9th November, 1734, gives a pleasant glimpse of the great singer.:

I know you wanted me to send you some theatrical news, but though I had a finger in the pie last year, and perhaps shall have another this year also, I am so disgusted with the whole business, that I can hardly bear to speak of it, much less to write. However, I must tell you something about Farinelli, who really deserves it. I confess he has surprised me, and I feel that till now I understood only a fraction of what human song can be, whereas now I am glad to think that I have heard all that there is or can be. Apart from his singing, he is a man of most amiable and courteous manners, and I take the greatest pleasure in his friendship and company. He has given me a present, the poems of Metastasio, which I had long desired, and which will help me to pass many pleasant hours, turning my thoughts to the glory of my country and to the old master [Gravina] who taught the pair of us.

In a later letter (25th March, 1735) he pays a further tribute to Farinelli, adding epigrammatically: “He is in truth a devil of a singer [“È veramente un Demonio”].

In spite of Farinelli, the “Opera of the Nobility” was not destined to be long-lived. London could not afford to support two opera-houses, and after the first blaze of the Farinelli furore had died down, the audiences grew small by degrees, and beautifully less. Mrs. Delany, as a devoted Handelian, was naturally contemptuous of the rival establishment. Even for Farinelli she hardly had a good word. “With this band of singers and dull Italian operas, such as you almost fall asleep at, they presume to rival Handel!”

The doom of both houses, in fact, was long since sealed. Rolli’s last contribution to the failing fortunes of his theatre was “Sabrina,” an adaptation of Milton’s “Comus,” which was produced in May, 1737. Only three performances were given. On the 11th of June, Farinelli sang, as Colley Cibber affirmed, “to an audience of five and thirty pounds,” and on the 14th the theatre was closed, owing to the “indisposition” of the great singer. Farinelli was not advertised to appear again, and the disastrous season closed in disgrace. “With so little *éclat*,” says Burney,

"did this great singer quit the English stage, that the town seems rather to have left him, than he the town!"

After the collapse of the two operas, the indomitable Heidegger swept the relics of both companies into his net, and in the autumn of 1737 opened a despairing season at the Haymarket Theatre, for which Rolli wrote a "Partenio," with music by Veracini (14th March, 1738), and for a season organized later on by the composer Pescetti at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket his fertile muse produced three more operas. Towards the close of his operatic career Rolli was once more to collaborate with Handel, for whom he wrote "Deidamia," produced in 1741, with which Handel bade farewell for ever to the stage. The revival of opera under Lord Middlesex in the same year provided more work for Rolli, who, together with the Abate Vanneschi, was engaged as poet to the establishment.

Among Rolli's contributions to the Middlesex season was "Penelope," set to music by Galuppi, regarding which Handel, writing from Ireland to his friend Jennens, indulged in a little good-humoured "chaff": "The first opera I heard myself before I left London, and it made me very merry all along my journey, and of the second opera, called 'Penelope,' a certain nobleman writes very jocosely, 'Il faut que je dise avec Harlequin, Notre Pénélope n'est qu'une Sallope.'"

Whatever were the faults of the Middlesex management, they had plenty of money, and were not afraid of spending it. Horace Walpole, writing to his friend Mann, laments the extravagance of the directors:

I am quite uneasy about the Opera, for Mr. Conway is one of the directors, and I fear they will lose considerably, which he cannot afford. . . . I will give you some instances of their extravagance, not to mention the improbability of eight thoughtless young men of fashion understanding economy. It is usual to give the poet fifty guineas for composing the books. Vanneschi and Rolli are allowed three hundred. Three hundred more Vanneschi had for his journey to Italy, to pick up dancers and performers, which was always as well transacted by bankers there. He has additionally brought over an Italian tailor—because there are none here. They have already given this *Taylorini* four hundred pounds, and he has taken a house at thirty pounds a year.

With such princely paymasters it is not surprising to learn that Rolli ere long was able to think of returning home. He left London in October, 1744, and retired to Todi, attracted, as his eighteenth century biographer tells us, by the salubrious climate and picturesque situation of the little Umbrian city, and by

the fact that two of his sisters were nuns there. His leisure, as his correspondence shows, was devoted to literature. He died on the 20th of March, 1765, at the age of 78, tended by a devoted servant whom he had brought with him from England. To this servant, whose name I judge to have been Samuel Ready, he bequeathed his entire fortune, together with a collection of his private correspondence. This is now in the possession of Ready's descendants, who, under the Italianized name of Retti, still inhabit Todi. A passage in Rolli's will relating to Ready deserves transcription:

And I concede to my aforesaid servant, Samuel Retti, the right to be buried by my side with this inscription: *Si est tibi servus fidelis, sit tibi quasi anima tua, quasi fratrem sic eum tracta.* (If thou have a faithful servant, entreat him as a brother: for thou hast need of him, as of thine own soul.—Eccl. xxxiii, 31.)

Happy Rolli! After a stormy and chequered career he found peace at the last among the vine-clad hills of his native land, and the pillow of his tranquil death-bed was smoothed by the hand of a faithful friend.